

VIDEO CONFERENCING TERMINAL

Technical Field

This invention relates to video conferencing and more specifically, to a video conferencing terminal particularly adapted to be utilized in a "pay phone" type environment, but usable without such environment as well.

Background of the Invention

Video conferencing systems are becoming more widely used due in part to the availability of the Internet. In a video conferencing system, a personal computer is utilized to display the image of one or more other conferees, and a bridging circuit is utilized to connect all of the conferees' systems together. Typically, a personal computer is utilized as the monitor with the audio signal being transmitted through the PC or through a separate telephone.

This is a fairly cumbersome arrangement as it requires numerous separate components (speakers, telephone, computer monitor, etc.) and is also not amenable to utilizing in a "pay phone" type environment. Specifically, there is no provision to allow for users to join a video conference from a public pay phone.

Summary of the Invention

The above and other problems of the prior art are overcome in accordance with the present invention which relates to an integrated video conferencing monitor/terminal which comprises the required components for a video conference contained within a single module and possibly activatable by means of a credit card or coins.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 shows an exemplary video conference terminal in accordance with the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Figure 1 shows a video conference terminal in accordance with the present invention. The arrangement at Figure 1 includes speakers 102, a display area 105, lights 103, a video monitor 104, keypad 107, and payment means 106, which may be a credit card reader and/or dollar bill or coin slot. The entire arrangement is preferably contained within a hard plastic or metal casing, and can be installed in an office or public environment.

The camera 104 is a conventional digital camera arranged to digitize the received image and transmit it to a remote conference server bridge. The original conference is set up by input from keypad 107 in accordance with standard telephony techniques. This keypad may convey DTMF or pulse tones, as a telephone keypad does, or it may convey digital data such as a computer keypad, or both.

In operation, a user swipes the credit card or inserts the appropriate amount of funds into payment means 106 and the system is activated. The user then joins the particular conference by utilizing the keypad 107 to dial up the server. The images of a variety of other conferees are displayed on display 105, and speakers 102 emit the combined audio signals from all other conferees, as is typical in conferencing systems.

In low cost video terminals, it is often required to provide additional lighting in order to achieve the required dynamic range of the video signal. Accordingly, lights 103 are installed on opposite sides of video camera 104 to point toward the subject and illuminate the subject.

As the video signal is received, it is digitized by camera 104 and transmitted to the server while simultaneously, a video signal from the server is displayed on monitor 105.

The foregoing video conference station may be connected to an Internet server via a standard telephone connection, or may utilize a high speed data link, telephone line, etc. The video and audio signals, as well as payment information in the case of payment means 106 being a credit card device, may be transmitted over the same communication lines as the video and audio information.

The above describes the preferred embodiment of the invention. Various other modifications or additions will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art, and are intended to be covered by the following claims.